



Stretching Your Food Dollar

It can seem especially difficult to make healthy choices when cooking on a fixed budget. This is why meal planning is so important. When you plan ahead, it is easier to include a variety of foods, it saves money and time, and will help you balance food choices in each meal. Here are some tips to make meal planning easier and more efficient.

- Take advantage of leftovers—for example, prepare a roast, serve part of it, and freeze the remaining part to use later in a different meal.
- Try generic or off-brands. They are usually less costly than name brands and are equally nutritious.
- Use the unit price (price per ounce, pound, or pint) to compare costs of different brands and package sizes. The unit price is determined by dividing the total cost of the product by the number of units the product contains. Most stores show the unit price on the shelf.
- Look for specials, sales, and coupons in newspapers. Remember, coupons save dollars only if you use them, so take advantage!
- Try canned and frozen fruits and vegetables. They often contain the same nutrient value, just watch out for sodium contents on canned vegetables. Many come in lower sodium versions.
- Freeze fresh fruit before it goes bad. Use it to make a smoothie, or thaw and serve with yogurt as a dessert.
- Use dry beans and peas occasionally instead of meat, poultry, or fish to vary meals and reduce cost. These foods provide protein and many of the same nutrients found in meat.
- Buy fresh vegetables and fruits in season, when they are generally less expensive.

Source: Preparing Nutritious Meals at Minimal Cost; USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion. 1999.

Food Stamps for the elderly

Many elderly people are food insecure and in need of nutrition-related assistance. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, in 1999, 1,439,000 households with elderly people reported that they did not have enough of the right types of food needed to maintain their health or simply did not have enough to eat. However, only a small proportion of low-income elderly people participates in the Food Stamp Program. The reasons for nonparticipation include a lack of information, a perceived lack of need, low expected benefits, the time and hassle involved in applying, and the stigma of receiving public benefits. Food stamps can be helpful in improving nutritional intake. On the federal level, there are special Food Stamp Program rules that apply to the elderly (people 60 years or older) that help increase their access and benefit levels. National information on applying for food stamps can be found at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/>. For Iowa-specific information, call 1-800-972-2017.